

A Century of Architecture
in the Maghreb, a Retrospective,
1914 – 2014

Despite the diversity found within the five countries that make up the Maghreb region with respect to recent history, political development, as well as architectural production, some parallels can be drawn between the architecture of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, especially in the first half of the twentieth century. In contrast, Mauritania's and Libya's specific histories have created entirely different urban development processes.

Morocco
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The development of architecture in Morocco in the twentieth century can be understood through the trends found within five clearly distinguished historical stages:

From the end of the nineteenth century until
the establishment of the French / Spanish
Protectorate in 1912

This historical stage is marked by two phenomena; firstly, the drastic change undergone by Moroccan society with the introduction of foreign trade, especially in coastal cities, and the subsequent arrival of many European traders. This was in addition to many consulates and rival diplomatic representation vying for the political dominance of the country. Secondly, the introduction of new building technology such as metallic structures, and brick vaulting had begun to leave its mark in what remained a largely rural country, despite some important cities (31 medinas could be referenced before the establishment of the Protectorate). Modern forms of ports, customs offices, warehouses appeared at this time.

From 1910 until the 1940s

In 1912, Morocco signed the protectorate treaty with France and Spain, thus making European domination over one of the last independent African countries official. This domination was increasingly visible in economic and military domains. On the urban level, this period is marked by the establishment of a strong administration, next to the traditional administration of the *Makhzen*. Notwithstanding clear differences between the zone under French domination, that under Spanish domination, and Tangier (a city under international authority) the overall structure was nevertheless the same: the establishment of a representative of the capital, usually a military official who has authority over the Pasha, the local representative of the Sultan.

One of the main figures of this period is indisputably, Hubert Lyautey, first Resident-General in Morocco in the French zone. Lyautey put in place an ambitious policy of preservation of local culture, and creation of new modern cities. Lyautey had at his side many professionals, some of whom came from the *Musée Social de Paris*. Consequently, he used urban planners like Henri Prost who helped create the first administration that dealt with issues of urbanism. Prost also from 1915 onwards made the first master plans of the country's main cities, including Casablanca, Rabat, Fes, Meknès, and Marrakech. At the same time, the creation of the *Service des Beaux-Arts* helped protect ancient sites abutting these newly-built cities.

This was a period of construction frenzy – which was eventually slowed by World War One – where architects, landscape professionals, engineers, master artisans (or *m'allemin*), and craftsmen hailing from diverse origins (Spanish, Italian, French, Greek, Algerian, Tunisian) came together.

The stylistic disputes of the time, found in major cities, were also manifested locally; Eclecticism, Classical Rationalism, Art Nouveau, Neo-Moorish style, and later on, Art Deco, Functionalism, and Modern Rationalism. These were represented by the work of a generation of architects who helped bring to fruition the freedom to create so characteristic of the new territories. A new kind of site-specific

architecture also appeared around the same time. Several architects such as Marius Boyer, Auguste Cadet, Edmond Brion, Aldo Manassi, Hippolyte Delaporte as well as others generated innovative projects and showed important dynamism and vitality.

This period also witnessed a number of operations "adapted" to the local population, such as the Habous compound in Casablanca or the Diour Jamaa in Rabat, both designed and built by A. Laprade, A. Cadet and E. Brion, and begun in the 1920s. There were also a number of workers' compounds built close to industrial zones or in mining areas, such as the Lafarge compound in Casablanca or the OCP in Boujniba.

The development of the zone under Spanish authority was somewhat different, mainly because of the break in construction induced by the Spanish Civil War. One can nonetheless note the construction in the 1920s of a number of remarkable monuments in the larger Northern cities such as Tetouan, Larache or Melilla.

From the 1940s until the 1970s

At the end of World War Two, and the symbolic landing of American troops, one can notice a clear shift in architectural production across Morocco. Not unlike the development of schools of thought and of new styles, the achievements of the 1950s were modern, devoid of decorative layers, and therefore very contemporaneous of their times. The influence from beyond the Atlantic was clear, especially in the cities of Casablanca or Port-Lyautey (now named Kenitra). The main architects of the period were Jean François Zevaco, Elie Azagury, Domenico Basciano, Alexandre Courtois, and Léonard Morandi amongst others.

These years also witnessed new and distinctly modernist master plans devised by Michel Ecochard and his team, who put the problem of mass housing on center-stage. Indeed, the Protectorate's last years witnessed several collective housing projects for both Europeans and Moroccans. At the same time the Ecochard grid was implemented as a solution to the problem of slums. The trend slowed down after Moroccan Independence in 1956, but the projects launched at the beginning of the 1950s went on to develop and expand in the years to come.

The Agadir earthquake of 1960 gave independent Morocco the opportunity to lead its first large-scale project. It was principally young modernist architects in Casablanca and Rabat who were tasked with rebuilding the city, a chance they seized to express themselves. This period's works consisted of space development and public monuments by architects such as Mourad Benembarek, Elie Azagury, Armand Amzalag, Henri Tastemain, Rafael Moretti, and Jean François Zevaco.

The 1960s also witnessed the building of many brutalist monuments in the country's large cities, which made a powerful statement. The architectural production of the time was still very contemporaneous of what was being produced elsewhere in the world.

The end of the 1960s constituted the beginning of a transitional period where many social mutations were taking place; principally, the mass exodus of Moroccan Jews as well as of Europeans (who were still somewhat present in the cities). The 1970s thus became an exceptional time where the Moroccanization of the economy, and the many social and political crises, limited growth, and caused architectural production to slow.